

*Blessings for Leaders:*

*Leadership Wisdom from the Beatitudes*

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### Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit,*

*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are they who mourn,*

*for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,*

*for they will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,*

*for they will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful,*

*for they will receive mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart,*

*for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,*

*for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,*

*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

## ***Introduction: Blessings for Leaders***

*To be a disciple of Jesus is to say yes to the Great Invitation to come forth to follow and to learn the ways of Jesus (Mt. 4:18-20).*

*To be an apostle of Jesus is to say yes to the Great Commission to go forth to lead and to teach the mission of Jesus (Mt. 28:18-20).*

***Imagine this scene:*** Jesus is teaching on a beautiful mountainside. The area overlooks the scenic Sea of Galilee (see photos on front and back cover). He has just called the Twelve to *come, learn and follow* as ***disciples*** (Mt. 4:18-22). Now he is starting a three-year process of training his *followers* to become *leaders* who will *go, teach and lead* (Mt. 28:16-20) as ***apostles***.

The script from the ***Gospel of Matthew*** gives us five small bits of information just prior to his famous Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:1-2):

- *He draws away from the crowds.* Jesus has been preaching. Teaching in the synagogues. Proclaiming the good news. Healing the people of every disease and illness. Great crowds gathered around him. His reputation is growing.
- *He begins to walk up a mountain.* He was near Capernaum, the town of Peter and Andrew, which is surrounded by the hills of Galilee. This is an opportunity for the disciples to spend quality time with their leader.
- *He sits down.* This is significant because sitting was a teaching position in that time and place. An important lesson is in the works.

- *His disciples gather around him.* This is significant because in the Gospel of Matthew, the focus is on leadership training. Jesus is not teaching the masses. This lesson was intended for his core group of *disciples* who will become *leaders*.
- *He begins to teach them, saying....* What follows is The Sermon on the Mount—the most direct teachings of Jesus.

*The young rabbi from Nazareth is about to change the course of human history.* His message is a source of uncommon wisdom for the ages.

*The next eight lines* of the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 5:3-10) are known as *The Beatitudes*, the opening to the Sermon on the Mount. They describe eight ways that God enters into our human lives and invites us into a divine relationship. They offer radical, counter-intuitive insight into Christian discipleship and the nature of leadership.

### *The Eight Beatitudes*

1. *Blessed are the poor in spirit:* Poverty of spirit is a paradox. The poor in spirit are spiritual giants. They are close to God because they recognize the need for God. They realize that God inspires the direction for leadership. They understand that *without followers, there are no leaders:* Leaders and followers do leadership together.
2. *Blessed are they who mourn:* Leaders who mourn learn to identify with the suffering of their people. They grow in compassion. Through personal mourning, they build experience and develop character. They grow in *wisdom* born of that experience. Through collective mourning, they build a sense of community.

3. ***Blessed are the meek:*** Leaders who are meek are paradoxically strong yet gentle, assertive yet cooperative, powerful yet restrained in the use of that power. The meek grasp the power of serving with strength and gentleness. Power grows exponentially for leaders with the grace and wisdom to accept blame and give away credit.
4. ***Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness:*** Leaders who hunger for righteousness are in right relationship with God and the people they lead. They grow in *credibility* because they are fair and just. They build trust because they are trustworthy. They have integrity because they *integrate* what they practice with what they preach.
5. ***Blessed are the merciful:*** Leading with mercy gives people the freedom to try new things. To take risks. The merciful provide cover for their people to innovate and sometimes to fail. The leader who shows *no mercy* inhibits the full potential of their followers as future leaders. The merciful open minds to new possibilities.
6. ***Blessed are the pure in heart:*** Leaders with a pure heart are motivated *first to serve* and then to lead. They are servant leaders who *socialize* the power by placing the people and the mission of the organization at the center of attention. Their motives are pure, not like those who lead with the ulterior motives of *personalized* power, honor and glory.
7. ***Blessed are the peacemakers:*** Peacemakers seek peace, not artificial harmony. Peacemakers reconcile conflict by collaborating rather than avoiding, competing or accommodating it. They promote healthy conflict about ideas and solutions. They hold meetings to *problem-solve* instead of meetings designed just to inform or to persuade.
8. ***Blessed are they who are persecuted because of righteousness:*** Leaders who practice the virtues associated with the first seven Beatitudes will face resistance, opposition and

discouragement. Leading by the Beatitudes takes *courage*. It defies conventional wisdom. Leaders meet resistance to change with the clarity of a shared vision.

***The Beatitudes*** suggest eight ways that God provides divine inspiration and invites us to become more fully human. It is interesting that God enters *gently, patiently and powerfully, but not with coercion*. What a great model for leadership! God invites, influences and inspires us.

***God has the power to coerce but does not coerce***. We have free will to follow God or not. Similarly, many in positions of authority have the power to coerce. We might be tempted to control or coerce but ***coercion is not leadership***. Leadership is a *voluntary* relationship.

### ***Blessings for Leaders***

The word ***beatitude*** is Latin for ***blessing***, which means “*a state of consummate bliss*.” The Greek word is “*makarios*”, which means “*a joy whose secret lies within*.” The joy that is associated with the depth and meaning of the Beatitudes is *counter-intuitive* (which means contrary to our usual way of thinking).

The Beatitudes are ***Blessings for Leaders*** because they provide counter-intuitive wisdom for leadership. ***The blessing*** of each Beatitude is granted now and in the future. The kingdom of God is declared in the Beatitudes as *already but not yet*. Each Beatitude can be seen both as a means and an end. The blessings are *pathways* (the means) and *promises* for the future (the end).

***The first paradox*** lies in the *pathway* to the blessing. According to the Beatitudes, to become spiritually poor, compassionate, meek, just, merciful, pure of heart, peaceful and persecuted is to be *blessed*. At first impression, this might look like a list of character flaws. Common thinking would suggest that anything *poor* is the bane of human existence. Being

strong, decisive and competitive would fit what most people think is a successful leader. In these Beatitudes, Jesus is challenging our assumptions, breaking down our stereotypes and suggesting new ways that are *counter-intuitive* and *counter-cultural*.

*The second paradox* lies in the *promise* of the blessing. Conventional wisdom would suggest that honor, glory, control, recognition and authority might be results sought by a successful leader. Our society preaches external rewards for human excellence. The blessings of the Beatitudes include consolation, justice, mercy and peace, all signs of the kingdom of God. This topples the scale of our cultural values. Living and leading by the Beatitudes fits the norms of a higher kingdom. The blessings of the Beatitudes – or *Blessings for Leaders* – run counter to the cultural norms that value instant gratification, fame and fortune.

*The third paradox to the Beatitudes* is that being *poor of spirit, compassionate, meek, just, merciful, pure of heart, peaceful* and *persecuted* can bring true joy in the here and now *and* divine blessings in the future. The Beatitudes promise a place of fulfillment where the kingdom of God is ours here and now *and* will be ours again in the future. To think it is either/ or is a *false dichotomy*. The Beatitudes offer the blessings of justice, mercy and peace “on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10), to quote the prayer that Jesus taught, the *Our Father*.

### ***Purpose of This Book***

*The Beatitudes of Matthew’s Gospel* offer spiritual and practical insight to develop the character needed *for leaders and followers*. They are offered by Jesus to his *disciples* – his followers, whom he is training to be leaders – at the very start of his Sermon on the Mount.

*The Beatitudes are eight bold statements about life  
that offer astonishing insight into leadership.*



*The purpose of this book* is to examine the wisdom Jesus provided in the Beatitudes so that we might improve the way we lead. *The world desperately needs leadership!* The Beatitudes are not a *textbook* for leadership. That would be an over-statement. But they provide valuable insights that we can use to examine our consciences, monitor our behaviors and build the *inner* qualities we need to become a human being capable of leadership.

*The Gospel of Matthew will be used consistently* throughout this book. It is ideal for this exploration because *developing followers into leaders – or disciples into apostles* – is a major theme of Matthew:

*Disciples follow, learn and then become apostles.*

*Apostles lead, teach and make disciples.*

*In each chapter*, we will consider the meaning of each Beatitude. We will look at Scripture and what Jesus teaches us about the internal journey of becoming a human being capable of leadership. And then we will look at the external challenges of leadership, applying the wisdom of each Beatitude to leadership theories, issues and topics.

*This book* focuses on how Jesus developed the *inner character* of his disciples so they were prepared for the *outer challenges* of leadership. I will approach the words and stories of Jesus *not as a theologian but as a sociologist*. I teach leadership, not theology. I will be looking at leadership theories and behaviors, not theological principles.

Most of us get promoted into positions of authority because of our *technical* expertise in a certain profession. Ironically, as we become leaders, we rely less on those technical skills and

more on *people* skills, such as listening and facilitation and *conceptual* skills, such as strategic planning and adaptive thinking.

*In this book, we will explore* the message of Jesus for *the wisdom of the ages*. We will gain insight into how we nurture the values, practice the virtues and develop the inner character to change the way we live, lead, manage and follow. Then we will consider *the modern day lessons* we have learned about the external challenges of leadership, such as mission, vision, core values, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, trust-building and teamwork.

*We will ask ourselves how can we walk in the footsteps of Jesus as we face the leadership challenges of our families, workplaces and communities.*